

THE GOD FROM THE SHELF

BY DONALD CORLEY

TALK had languished on the deck of the *Claudion*. The air was motionless; the bay was as still as water in a tumbler; the moon was like a brass tack on the edge of the sky. Even the little lights in the houses and aboard the ships at anchor in the bay of Papeete burned steadily and unwinkingly.

A Chinese deck boy, dressed in yellow silk, had just removed the coffee cups from the rattan table aft, and was shuffling toward the companionway with his tray.

"Bring some more champagne, Yuen," his master called after him, lazily.

The group in the languorous deck chairs stirred; a wave of relief swept over the four men and three women. It was as if each of them said: "Oh, well—yes . . . more champagne. . . . It's a dull evening."

Only the woman sitting at the stern, apart from the others, did not stir in her chair. Her red hair glinted like metal in the moonlight; her white profile was sharp against the night; her long, angular hands were clasped listlessly around a vanity chest upon her knees.

A match was lighted, and the sound was followed by a little hiss as it struck the water a moment later.

The silence persisted.

"Are we waiting for that champagne, or . . . are we all . . . just bored?" ruminated the man who smoked a pipe.

No one answered.

One of the women tapped a cigarette languidly upon the arm of her chair, affixed a long jade holder to it, and regarded it thoughtfully, as if undecided whether to smoke it or not. Her ritual was perfect.

"Great motive force," the man with the pipe went on, "boredom. Starts

war. Stops it. Drives men to make things, and women to break them—"

"The *same* things, Marvel?" queried the woman of the jade cigarette holder.

The man waved his pipe loosely. "Doesn't matter," he said, "whether they're made—or broken."

"What *does* matter to you, 'Vel, you old destructionist?" inquired the host and owner of the *Claudion*.

"Lots of things, Barney," said the man with the pipe, quietly. "What people do to escape boredom, what men make, and what women break; what I do to escape, for instance; what the beach comber, whom I saw ashore yesterday below the town, expected to find when the tide came in."

"Why didn't you ask him?" said the second woman, who was not only charming, but worse. And still, her query was not quite flippant, but plaintive, rather.

"I did," 'Vel rejoined, "and he said, 'You always find what you need to find.'"

"But one wants so many things that one doesn't need," I suggested.

"Limit your choice," said he; "do not want so many things, and you will get some."

"Well, that disciple of Epictetus seemed to have precipitated his life, so to speak. He lived by the tide; it was his clock, as well as his daily argosy—variable as to time, as well as cargo—returning, as he saw it, from the ends of the sea, bringing to him his pro rata, as he regarded it, of the things of this earth. Took me to his house, and offered me—what do you suppose? Char treuse, in a little cup hollowed out of a bird's skull.

"This come ashore, too?" I asked.

"He nodded. 'All of my clothes came ashore,' he told me."

"Strikes me, 'Vel," said the host, "you've got more out of Papeete than any of us. Wish you'd take me to see your beach comber to-morrow."

"I thought we were leaving to-morrow," said the worse than charming woman.

"We *did* decide that, didn't we?" he acknowledged, regretfully.

Yuen appeared in the rectangle of light at the companionway, tray in one hand, bucket in the other. Rubber-footed chairs were hitched toward the table, making little bruised sounds.

Yuen uncorked a champagne bottle and filled the glasses. At a slight gesture from his master, he took one, carefully, and carried it to the woman at the stern. She remained oblivious, and he placed the glass on the arm of her chair.

The champagne somewhat banished lethargy. The woman with the jade cigarette holder solicited a light; the two men who had not spoken came out of their reverie. One of them, who had been an officer in the French army, a

man still under the haze of shell shock, began, languidly:

"I'm not so sure but that you're right, 'Vel. I remember being at a listening post in a hollow tree of concrete for six days, in nineteen sixteen . . . near Soissons . . . unable to stir except before daybreak and after dark. Had to sit there all day in the sun; over there was the unknown, very near. I could see men moving; could pick up a word or two now and then. Might have been blown out of that field any minute, but my chief sensation was that of extreme boredom. The tree was uncomfortable. I couldn't smoke. Hadn't any water most of the time. But I was, mainly, just bored."

"What do you think about it, Evelyn?" asked the host, of the worse than charming woman.

"I think women are in little better plight, Barney. First they're amused by expectation, then by calculation, then just by the business of being a woman. I mean being *chic* and all that. Later they



THE CHINESE DECK BOY MOVED SILENTLY AMONG THE CHAIRS

are amused by acquisition—a husband, 'things,' children, or a keeper—but it seems to me that the woman who acknowledges that she *is* bored, is apt, being desirous of having 'a good day' every day . . . well, I should say she had, then, an ambition, and that's a fortunate thing for her. But most women don't know that they *are* bored, you see—or won't confess it to themselves—afraid to—so they don't even become actively ambitious, but simply take whatever offers."

"Wouldn't we welcome some one who would amuse us this evening?" asked the man who had said nothing. "We leave our environment, taking with us all of it that will go aboard a yacht, and we come to find what Gauguin and the others told us *they* found. But we don't seek after it as they did. We sit on deck, with precisely the same things about us that we have at home—the things without which we feel ill at ease; and so we find nothing that Gauguin and Melville found. We need to be lifted out of our environment—I don't mean the physical one, but out of our way of thinking. We need to play a new part, to have to think unfamiliar thoughts, to be thrown into a totally different galley, mentally, to stop being bored. We are like the Englishman and his dinner coat in the Never-never Land of Australia. He had only 'damper and tea' for dinner, but he was dressed for dinner just the same."

"But I like that!" said the woman of the jade cigarette holder.

"So do I," said the man, gently. "I liked *him*. Ritualist. But I liked better the man I dined with the next day after that, in the Never-never Land—a man who caught fish and baked them over an open fire, and managed a dessert out of this and that, and talked of the Renaissance with me until daybreak. When I awoke he was gone, leaving me one of his two books as a gift. He had no dinner coat with him, and was in search of opals. The book was Judith Gautier's *Livre de Jade*."

"Vera, don't you want your cham-

pagne?" called the host to the woman at the stern, genially.

The woman turned her head slightly and looked at him, but answered nothing. Her silence was explicit. It indicated everything. It was not rude, but infinitely remote, detached, absent, beyond boredom, and filled with the dignity and the beauty of a spiritual isolation.

Her champagne remained untouched; it bubbled and became still, like the woman.

Yuen appeared, phantomlike, dressed in white instead of yellow silk, a straw hat in his hands. He approached his master interrogatively.

"Oh yes, you're going ashore, aren't you?" said Barney, rising. "Here, I'll help you with the boat. Tom ashore, too?"

"Yeppy," said Yuen.

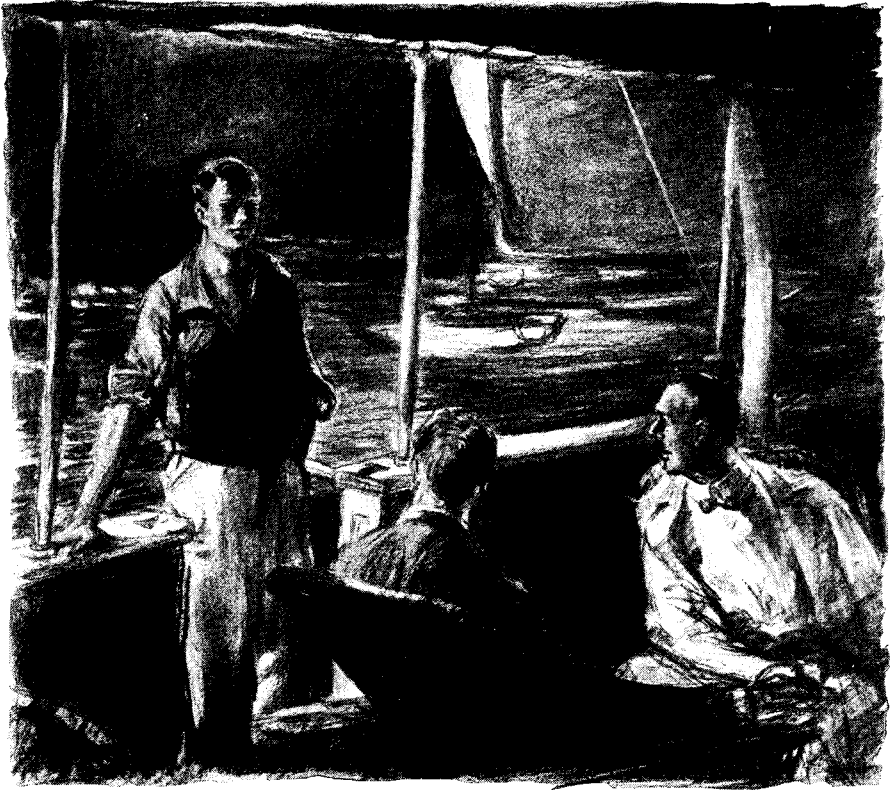
"Try to get back by nine to-morrow," said Barney, kindly, and he lowered the boat.

The sound of Yuen's feet upon the landing steps died away, succeeded by an oar splash. Barney lounged over to his chair, stretching his arms and yawning—a big man, with almost too much strength.

"Good boy, Yuen," he remarked. "Never says a word. Thinks. All the crew gone, and Tom, too, but Yuen knows I keep promises. Told him a week ago he could go ashore to-night. Trusts me. I like him for that."

"Do you think Yuen ever gets bored?" asked the second woman.

"No. . . . You see, he expects to go back to Canton some day, with the money he can save, and pay his father's fine—political crime. I offered to give it to him once, and d'you know what he said? 'All samee, all-timee no-timee.' When he pays it, you see, he can then be a mandarin. I forget the degree. Bored? I think not. In the summer he spends his spare time carving bones into miniature temples, and taming crickets down at Easthampton, and in the winter he works on a book he's writing. . . .



"GOOD EVENING, GENTLEMEN," WAS WHAT THEY HEARD

Columbia man, you know." Barney spoke affectionately, a little sadly, as if he, too, would like to carve temples out of bones and write books.

"Any of you men want to come down and play bridge?" asked the woman of the jade cigarette holder. "Evelyn?"

The officer of the French army and the other man rose, and Evelyn, too, acquiesced. The four paused at the companionway, as if hoping for some alternative, but no one made any comment. 'Vel lighted a new pipe, and he and the host drew toward each other, a trifle tacitly, as if to be out of earshot of the woman at the stern, who had not moved. She sat there, well in the moonlight that came in under the awning, a mute and impassive figure; and the light touched her white face, and the large golden comb shaped as a cithera in her hair, the stones of her rings, and the

buckles of her slippers. A languid breeze stirred her skirt. She was like some beautiful moth, brooding upon a window curtain, without impulse, scarcely conscious of its loveliness . . . simply pausing in the timelessness of a summer.

The two men stared at her with a certain awe, some anxiety, and with a great deal of intentness.

"Glad to be going back, Barney?" asked the other.

The big man ran his hands through his hair abstractedly.

There crept up from below the insinuating sound of a piano played with soft pedal behind closed doors, played hesitatingly, yet surely, with unexpectednesses and sharp changes, staccato surprises and adagio pauses; at once brooding and assertive, dreamy and despairing, and full of interrogation.

"I guess auction had no charms,"

said Barney, and then, in an under key: "*I'd like to stay,*" he ruminated, with a sidelong glance at the woman, "but when she gets like this—been this way for two days now—I don't know what else to do. Suggested running over to Shanghai, Bangkok, Saigon, and up by elephant to see the Cambodian palaces, but . . ."

'Vel nodded his perfect comprehension.

"I'm afraid," Barney went on, almost in a whisper—"I'm afraid she's—she's got to the end—with me. . . ."

'Vel reached out a hand and patted Barney's silently.

"You know," Barney went on, almost inaudibly, "she's never had anything that she really wanted—not that she hasn't had everything that a woman may have. I guess she never wanted *anything* very much, but I don't know. . . . Maybe *I* haven't got it—but she's the only woman I could ever marry," he added.

"But *you*, now," 'Vel asked, with an exceeding gentleness, quite as an elder brother would speak, although he was much the younger of the two, "shall you like to go back to South Broad Street, to motor back and forth from Long Island? I mean, do you get any fun out of your life at home . . . apart from—?" And he nodded imperceptibly in the direction of the woman.

"Born in it," said Barney, tersely, with profound acceptance, but with a tinge of sadness. "Wouldn't know how to break away. Always wanted to, though. Guess I never can. How about you, 'Vel? But you're happy anywhere, happy as anyone can expect to be, who values nothing particularly, I mean."

"And everything," dropped 'Vel, quietly, with a furtive look at the woman.

The music from below suddenly became party to their conversation, as it were, with complicated chime chords, followed by a recitative, poignant and searching. The woman in the chair stirred, and the clasp of the pomegranate-colored vanity chest ended a phrase

of the music with a sharp snap. Both of the men started, and Barney, after a moment, remarked:

"Evelyn always plays as if she had a big glass retort, and was bent upon pouring every known chemical into it, to see what would happen."

"I guess she finds out new laws of musical chemistry that way," said 'Vel, lightly. "It's her form of speculation."

As if a door below had opened, the improvisation became wild and brilliant and Slavic. It seemed to fill the vast, empty, brittle night.

Suddenly a voice from the landing steps made both men turn their heads.

"Good evening, gentlemen," was what they heard, charged with mockery, amusement, self-possession; a well-bred voice with a merry devil in it.

The man that they saw standing there, in a blue shirt and white trousers, bareheaded, was smiling serenely, but the moonlight glittered upon something at his belt that they both saw was a revolver. The apparition leaned against the rail, his left hand in his trousers pocket, his right on the rail—a fine, nervous, alert hand, they saw, too.

'Vel simply looked at the man, but his eyelids flickered, in half recognition.

Barney started up from his chair, but a quick movement of the stranger's hand stayed him.

"Please don't get up," was the courteous, affable request he made, but in as sure a tone as if he were commanding. "I only came up to get something."

"What?" asked Barney.

"Well, the truth is, I'm rather short of champagne," said the man, lazily, "and . . ." His eyes wandered quickly around the deck, taking in everything, resting on the woman at the stern for an instant.

"Who the devil are you?" inquired Barney.

"That is of no consequence—for the moment," replied the other. There was something in his demeanor that was amused, baffling, superior.

"Pirate, eh?" said Barney.

The man shrugged his shoulders negligently.

A head appeared behind him, and a younger man came up slowly. He, too, carried a revolver, which he partly drew out of its holster.

"Just go down and ask the lady to keep on playing, Caleb," said the pirate, without looking at him; "and don't be abrupt," he added, as the man went noiselessly down the companionway.

"About how much champagne do you think you want?" inquired Barney, ironically.

The woman at the stern had turned her head, and was looking on with something like interest.

"Oh, I think I shall need a great deal," was the response, "but I'm going to leave you two cases besides the one you

have open. The other seven— Oh, Bill!" he called, softly.

A second head appeared, and a weather-beaten man came up, and saluted.

"Bill, this gentleman has seven cases of champagne down below that he is going to contribute to our welfare."

The man called Bill went below with quiet celerity.

The piano had paused for a moment, then it went on, with slightly more vehemence. Evidently "Caleb" had been abrupt.

"I'd like a cigarette," said the pirate, and lounged over to the table. "With your permission?"

Barney waved his hand toward the box on the table. The pirate remained standing, alert, easy, without constraint; selected and lighted his cigarette with



THE PIRATE REGARDED HER WITH A SOMBER FIRE IN HIS EYES



THE PIRATE'S BOAT WAS PASSING THE YACHT'S BOW

his left hand, taking a match from his pocket.

'Vel blew a great cloud of smoke, and smiled.

Barney, who sat tensely in his chair, turned and looked toward the town, as the man called Bill came up the companionway with a case, which he took to the landing steps, and down.

"Well," said Barney, "you're pretty cool," as Bill returned and went below again.

The pirate smiled. "Aren't you?" he inquired.

"See here!" Barney exploded. "What the hell *is* your game? You don't look like a man who steals champagne."

"No?" said the other, indifferently. "And you don't look like a man who would keep the price of sugar up. But you do, when it suits you, and—if you're looking out for your crew," he added, in an amused tone, "I shouldn't worry about them if I were you; probably they'll come back to-morrow afternoon,

with a bit of a head—hydra, as it were—drank a little too much square-faced gin." (There was a deprecating cough from the man called Bill, who was passing with his third case.) "All asleep down the beach there in a hut. . . . As I was saying, it's a predatory world—shark eats big fish; big fish eats little fish; little fish eats worm; worm does the best he can; but the shark has an ally—"

"The pilot fish?" inquired 'Vel.

"Right," said the pirate, with a twinkle. "Goes along to show the shark the way; gets immunity, among other things."

"What part do you play in this allegory?" asked Barney, interested in spite of his irritation.

"None," said the pirate, calmly. "Been all of them, at one time or another. I'm a little 'outside.' You take what you need" (and he glanced at the woman curiously as he spoke; their eyes met for the first time, in a cool, level

stare)—“or what comes,” he went on. “I happen to need some champagne this evening—giving a little dinner day after to-morrow.”

Barney stared at him, and suddenly grinned. “You’re not a bad sort,” he remarked. “Wouldn’t you like a drink now?”

“Don’t mind if I do,” said the other, affably, and drew up a chair, facing the woman at the stern.

Barney uncorked the second bottle in the bucket and poured first a few drops in his own glass, and then filled one near the pirate. ‘Vel waved his pipe in refusal, and Barney’s mute interrogation of the woman netted him nothing, so he filled his own glass.

The man called Bill had appeared and reappeared, with cases, noiseless, efficient, never once glancing at the group at the table.

The pirate held up his glass, and looked through it, either at the moon or the woman; tasted it with relish, almost with the gesture of a toast—to the moon or the woman—and spoke over his shoulder to the man called Bill (who had set his last case down at the rail, and was waiting there, staring at vacancy), “That’s all, Bill.” He seemed to know that Bill had finished his task, though his bare feet had made no perceptible sound.

“Doesn’t your man want a drink?” said Barney, easily.

“Never touches it,” said the pirate.

“Mind telling us a little about yourself?” inquired ‘Vel. “You see, we’ve all been a little bored, and conversation had almost ceased when you came. . . . Not asking you anything personal” (he gave a sharp look at the pirate, with a quizzical lift of his eyebrows), “of course, but—?”

“Sure,” grinned the pirate, cheerfully, after a long look at ‘Vel. Something like a wink was exchanged between them. “I’m only working out my destiny; was bored once, myself; got born in the wrong *milieu*, stuck in it, feeling responsible, until one day I realized I wasn’t responsible to anyone, any more, except

to myself; so I cleared out, having duly provided for the contingencies of my *milieu*. . . .”

A shade of wonderment passed over ‘Vel’s face, and he nodded his head.

“I had no longer anything to fulfill, you understand; had done pretty well what was expected of me, didn’t owe anything more to human relationships—so here I am, *to-day*,” he added, with a certain quaint emphasis on the word.

‘Vel, who had been tilting his chair backward, brought it down with a thump, and began, in a leisurely fashion, to trepan his pipe with a match, looking down into the bowl with an inquisitive air, as a *rabassier*, having found his quarry, scratches in the ground and waits for his master to come, saying, by his uplifted paw, “On my word of honor as a dog, there’s a truffle here.”

“Get much fun out of piracy?” inquired Barney, as of a fellow craftsman, with the polite interest of the perfect host who finds all matters worthy of discussion. “*Have* some champagne.”

There was a slight cough from the man called Bill. And the pirate, after tasting his second glass, pushed it negligently away, and helped himself to a cigarette.

“*Awfully* good cigarettes,” he murmured, appreciatively.

“Like some to take along?” said Barney, affably. There was in his tone a little of the gratification of the man who hears his private blend of tobacco praised, and a little of something else, smoothly disguised. ‘Vel smiled with deep amusement, as Barney fished some keys out of his pocket, and, selecting one, signaled to the man called Bill.

“In number one,” he said, pleasantly, “top locker, left side, three tin boxes of a thousand each. Bring up one, will you?”

“Thanks,” said the pirate, and to his perceptible nod, the weather-beaten man went below with the keys. “*Awfully* decent of you,” he added, to Barney.

‘Vel smiled to himself, as Barney started to rise.

The pirate’s chair went back an inch.

"I beg your pardon," said he, very quietly, but in a tone like cold steel, and he stared Barney in the eyes, all of his cheerful *bonhomie* gone. His look said: "My man is *not* a sneak thief; and you needn't think, either, that by sending him downstairs on a courteous errand you can put anything over on me. For the moment I'm your guest; that would be a dirty trick. Just now I was a pirate, but there is a time for everything . . . and just because I *have* sat down to drink with you and discuss philosophy is precisely why this is a time of truce."

Barney understood him perfectly, as a practiced gambler, and relaxed into his chair again, thinking better of whatever ulterior motive he had.

The pirate flicked the ash from his cigarette, and hitched his chair forward. The rules had been preserved. 'Vel finished his trepanning, reprimed his pipe, and lighted it, with a humorous side glance at the woman.

The music that stole up from below had become a little, nervous, dissonant, restive.

"It's just a game with you, then?" inquired 'Vel, of the pirate, breaking the tension.

"Call it an art," said the other, his easy-going manner coming back. "You see—" He hesitated, and looked fixedly at the woman, who was looking out over the bay again, her face averted; and, as if giving up his reticence with the ash from the end of his cigarette, "Of course, gentlemen, you will never repeat what I'm going to tell you" (he spoke half boyishly, looking all the time at the woman), "but my ambition has always been to restore, where possible, and not to destroy, to contribute a little order to the universe—or even a little agreeable disorder."

The man called Bill returned with a tin box, gave the bunch of keys to Barney, and went over to the rail, where he stood, immobile, with the box under his left arm.

"About the world there are certain things that are not in their proper

places," the pirate resumed; "shall we say they are simply waiting to be returned to their original niches or market stalls, or—? And those other things that have never been in their natural *locales*. Please understand, I do not include your champagne in either of these abstractions."

Barney made a wry face, as if to say, "It's *your* champagne now," and lifted his hand resignedly.

"And I do my humble part as carrier. . . . You've seen hothouse flowers in a Northern greenhouse, that not only leaned to the sun, but almost pleaded to be set free and returned to the morass they'd never seen. You've observed, no doubt, a lioness born in captivity who nevertheless knew, in her eyes, at least, how *her* world ought to look. You've also seen," he went on, in another key, "certain inanimate things that were stolen and never got returned. If they had been, they might have become animate, the bronze horses of St. Mark's—so called—thus giving the credit to the thief. But you see what I mean? The bronze horses were returned to St. Mark's after Napoleon had stolen them; but why shouldn't they have been taken back to Constantinople, where Enrico Dandolo stole them, and thence to the Arch of Trajan, or just a little farther, to the place that they were first set up, from which they were first stolen? *That* would be poetic restitution."

"Is that *your* procedure?" asked Barney, interestedly.

"Most of the time," said the other. "Naturally, it's more fun sometimes to take things for the fun of taking, or out of necessity. But I picked up a chap once who had got shaken out of the dice cup at Trinidad, when he needed to be in Florida, and I landed him on a key. Another time it was a little Lucarelli that had been stolen from some friends of mine in Ancona."

"And you stole it back?" inquired 'Vel, amusedly.

"There is a temple in a village up the Payankiang River, in the province of

Chiekiang," the pirate went on, ignoring the question, "where one god was missing from the row on the stone shelf—had been missing for forty years. The priests had turned out hundreds of prayer rolls for the return of that god. . . . Well, I saw him one day, sitting on a buhl table in—well, let's say in the East Eighties, or the Avenue Henri Martin, it doesn't matter where. He was a bit nicked and battered, having journeyed nearly around the world, and rested uncomfortably on so many buhl tables, and behind the doors of so many antique-shop cabinets. He had been repainted in places, but—well, he's back on the stone shelf, in his right place, and the priests of Quang-ho have time to pray for other things now. Do you see?"

"Yes," said Barney, "but *I'm* interested to know about your takings for the fun of taking?"

"Now you couldn't expect me to tell you much about *that*," the pirate grinned; "that's always impulsive, you see . . . might happen any time. The other is deliberate, foreplanned, an intellectual abstraction."

The woman at the stern had abandoned her vanity chest and was occupied in drawing off her rings and putting them on again, without looking at the men. There was a flavor of mockery in her gesture.

"Once—" the pirate began, intently. There was a very slight, sepulchral cough, casual enough, but definite, from the man called Bill, and he cut short what he had begun to say, and turned to 'Vel. "Wonder if you'd mind going down," said he, "and telling Caleb to come up?"

"Certainly," said 'Vel, pleasantly. The two looked at each other for a long moment, and the pirate held out his hand, which was warmly shaken.

"Some other evening," said the pirate, and 'Vel nodded and went below.

"Got to be running along now," he said to Barney, getting up. Barney rose also, and the woman clasped her hands and stared at them. They were both

big, strong, seasoned, adequate. They stood looking at each other, and the intruder smiled.

"Thanks for the cigarettes," he said, simply, but did not extend his hand, nor did Barney.

"Anything else you'd like?" asked the latter, half ironically.

"Yes . . . there is," was the quiet answer.

"Well—what?"

The pirate looked past him at the woman, who had got up, laying the vanity chest on her chair.

Barney looked from one to the other; it seemed to dawn upon him, dimly, what was happening, as the woman walked slowly down the deck, and past him, with scarcely a glance. There was an atmosphere of abandon in her movements, a definite relinquishment in the way that she drew three rings from her fingers and laid them on the rattan table. They made a clinking sound, like ice in a thin glass. They were put down gently, as things once cherished, but now irrelative, unimportant.

She faced the pirate, a tall woman, in her early thirties, ripened and firmly molded and infinitely mysterious in her self-containment, as if life had never touched her poignantly until this moment. The pirate regarded her with a somber fire in his eyes, and after a tense and pregnant pause, Barney seemed to come to some acceptance in his mind, and the pirate kindled to flame as the woman went swiftly past him, brushing his arm with hers, to the landing steps, where the man called Bill was holding his arm in readiness for her. Caleb appeared at this moment, closing the doors of the companionway behind him. He locked them and thrust the brass key into his pocket.

"Locked 'em in saloon," said Caleb, hurriedly, as if he hadn't altogether liked doing it, and went to the landing steps.

The pirate turned on his heel and followed him, without looking at Barney again. But Barney stood transfixed

where he was, and made no movement. The sound of an auxiliary exhaust, well muffled, aroused him, and he staggered to the rail. The pirate's boat was passing the yacht's bows, and a sharp rap on the forward deck, and a metallic clatter, caused Barney to lurch in that direction. Something glittered on the deck and he stooped and picked it up. It was the key to the companionway doors.

He looked at the thing stupidly, and then at the boat making seaward rapidly. The moon glinted upon the golden comb in the woman's hair, and Barney passed his hand over his eyes to shut out the sight. Then he made his way back to the stern, to the empty chair, picked up the pomegranate-colored vanity chest and came back to the table. In it he placed the three rings scattered there, and, moving deliberately now, returned to the chair. Over the back of it was a scarf of iridescent glass beads. He wrapped the little chest in it, carefully, held it to his lips a moment, and

dropped it overboard. The splash of it died away, and after a little the big man heaved his shoulders, took out a cigarette case, and lighted one of his "awfully good cigarettes."

Presently he returned along the deck, looked about on the table, found the brass key, unlocked the companionway doors and opened them silently. Then he found a chair and sank into it.

'Vel lounged up to the deck a moment later, unruffled, unperturbed.

"Hello!" said he. . . . "The pirate gone?"

Barney nodded.

'Vel looked about. "Take anything else with him?"

"Vera."

"Vera?"

"Yes."

"Well . . ." said 'Vel, slowly, coming over and looking down at him, "I saw that *that* was to happen when . . . he came aboard. . . ."

"So did I," answered Barney.